

California Planning Emphasis Areas for the Fiscal Year 2008/2009 Overall Work Program

Per the FTA Fiscal Year 2008 Apportionments and Allocations and Program Information notice, published January 28, 2008, in recognition of the priority being placed upon the implementation of the new and changed provisions of SAFETEA-LU, FTA and FHWA are not issuing new national planning emphasis areas for FY 2008 and have rescinded the emphasis areas from prior years. The FHWA California Division and FTA Region IX have determined that the following areas of the planning program warrant increased attention in 2008:

Financial Planning

As the only carryover PEA from the 2007 OWP submittal, financial planning has been included for 2008 because it continues to be area of emphasis for FHWA. Based upon SAFETEA-LU requirements and recent financial planning guidance, the California division office has identified several areas for continued improvement related to this issue. The Planning Team staff will be working closely with the MPOs to be certain that both regulatory requirements and sound planning practice are observe. These include:

1. reflecting project costs and project phase costs in year-of-expenditure dollars;
2. properly reflecting advance construction projects and their conversion to federal-aid funding in the FTIPs and FSTIP;
3. assuring that project costs have been updated to reflect the latest available information and include an estimate of the total project cost; and,
4. reflecting the estimated costs of constructing, maintaining and operating the total (existing plus planned) transportation system, including portions of the system owned and operated by local governments, in financial plans.

FHWA's Resource Center has issued the first two parts of a three-part report on how to better reflect fiscal constraint for transportation plans and programs. The first part, entitled Revenue Sources and Forecasting, provides examples for MPOs to utilize when determining appropriate annual revenues to be assumed in the programming process. The second part, Cost Estimation, provides a framework for MPOs to document and manage cost estimation during the planning and programming phases of project development. The third part will be focused on operations and maintenance costs throughout a project's expected operation period, and is expected to be available during 2008. FHWA expects MPOs to utilize the revised revenue and cost estimation templates developed through this partnership with the Resource Center in the development of the 2009 FTIPs during the summer and fall of 2008.

FHWA expects that cost estimates will be updated throughout the life of each project. At a minimum, project financial information should be adjusted at each of the following steps in the project development process: OWP; RTP; TIP; STIP; NEPA completion; final design; ROW authorization; PS&E approval; construction award; and operations/maintenance. At each of these points, project costs should be compared to current program and Plan project estimates, and any significant differences should be reconciled through the appropriate planning and programming processes.

Congestion

Reducing congestion has been one of FHWA's "Vital Few" areas of strategic importance over the past few years, and it is an area in which California faces tremendous challenges in the decades ahead. With the forecast for growth in population and goods movement expected to further strain California's transportation system, mitigating congestion is a topic that cannot be ignored. The planning process also mandates that MPOs shall include operations and management strategies to relieve congestion in their transportation plans, and allows for the inclusion of projects that address current or projected congestion in particular corridors or portions of the region. In TMA areas, a cooperatively-developed congestion management process (CMP) that relies on performance measures and strategies to reduce single-occupant vehicle (SOV) travel and manage demand is required to be developed and utilized in the project prioritization process. And in TMAs in nonattainment areas, no Federal funds may be spent on SOV projects unless they are derived from a CMP and appropriate alternative strategies have been identified and included as a project component. The California division office, by way of assisting MPOs in their endeavors to reduce congestion or mitigate its impacts, would like to determine how all MPOs are addressing congestion through the planning process. In TMA areas, we would like to know how Federally-funded projects that result in significant increases in SOV capacity are being addressed through a CMP. In your OWP, please include work program elements that address these issues and be prepared to provide additional detail on the topic during the Annual Meeting.

Performance Measures

As a result of several recent changes to the administration of the Federal-Aid Highway Program in California due to the passage of SAFETEA-LU, the adoption of a new Stewardship and Oversight Agreement between Caltrans and FHWA and the assignment of responsibility for the majority of NEPA concerns, there has been a renewed focus in the California division office on the establishment of benchmarks to gauge success in the operation of the transportation system. Performance measurement is one mechanism that FHWA is utilizing to gain insight into, and make judgments about, the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs and processes that are major components of this system. Caltrans will be providing reports on their performance measures to FHWA periodically so that resources can be focused in areas where they are necessary to achieve improvements in system operation. In much the same way, the Congestion Management Process (CMP) requires TMAs to gauge the performance of their regional transportation system and assess the relative value of projects during the prioritization process (23 CFR 450.320). FHWA and FTA would like to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms used by MPOs to accomplish these and any other tasks for which performance measurement is currently in use. We would like to know, specifically, for each MPO:

1. What performance measures do you have in use?
2. How are they utilized, and to what end(s)?
3. What have been the most recent results?

Project Listings

Throughout the course of the program year, FHWA and FTA are requested to approve aspects of the project development process such as funding authorizations or project-level conformity determinations. In order to provide these approvals, the project listings in programming documents should be adequately detailed so that compliance with Federal requirements can be determined. Project listings in the TIP should contain:

1. sufficient descriptive material to identify the project or phase, determine funding eligibility and enable a consistency finding to be made between the TIP, Plan and NEPA document. In nonattainment or maintenance areas, design concept and scope sufficient for air quality conformity analysis;
2. estimated total project cost and a demonstration that full funding is reasonably anticipated to be available during the time period for completion of the project;
3. the amount of Federal funds proposed to be obligated during each program year for the project or phase. For the first year, this includes the proposed category of Federal funds and source(s) of non-Federal funds. For the second, third, and fourth years, this includes the likely category or possible categories of Federal funds and sources of non-Federal funds; and,
4. identification of the agencies responsible for carrying out the project or phase.